

A GOAL down in the 54th minute, Wycombe Wanderers hit back within 30 seconds and then took the lead two minutes later to clinch three points against Hitchin that keeps them right in contention for the Rothmans Isthmian League title.

This was a crucial game for Wycombe after last Saturday's defeat at Croydon. They had to win to keep pace with leaders Enfield who are six points ahead but have played two more games. Defeat would have given the Middlesex club a real boost but they must know that the Blues are hard on their heels waiting for any slip.

Enfield have only four games to go to complete their programme but Wanderers now start a series of three successive home games and if they can take maximum points, it would put real pressure on the leaders.

Saturday's trip to Hitchin was full of pitfalls for the Blues. The home side were on a winning streak and had beaten Wycombe at Loakes Park earlier in the season. But the Blues put all that behind them to record a deserved victory.

Throughout the game they looked the more dangerous side but once again they were plagued by missed chances. There would have been an amazing scoreline if both sides had put the ball away with more regularity but as it was, Wanderers had to suffer a few anxious moments at the close as Hitchin strove to take a share of the points.

In the remaining games, it

is going to be more vital than ever that Wycombe take their scoring opportunities. One man finding it difficult to hit the target is Howard Kettleborough, who could have had a hat-trick at Hitchin. Ian Pearson also hasn't scored for two games — that's a drought for him — and it was a defender and a midfield player who hit Saturday's brace.

One pleasing aspect of Wycombe's play, however, was the improvement in midfield where Mick Holifield was a constant danger. A word of praise too, should go to Dylan Evans, whose control was excellent on a hard, bumpy pitch.

EXPOSED

Conditions weren't pleasant at Topfield, a strong wind and driving snow greeting the players as they ran out onto the pitch. Peter Spittle was playing instead of the injured John Maskell while Evans replaced Steve Hill.

Hitchin Town 1, Wycombe Wanderers 2

Compared with the events after the break, the first half was a little dull. Wanderers made all the early running and once or twice exposed flaws in Hitchin's defence. With Tony Martin playing in Midfield, they robbed themselves of their best defender.

Chances were few and far between but Holifield almost broke the ice in the 23rd minute when he headed Pearson's near post corner towards the net but saw Kevin Hammond clear off the line. At the other end Martin sent a dipping free kick just past Spittle's upright.

Sustained pressure would probably have seen Hitchin defence collapse but Wycombe's attacks were too infrequent. John Priestley forced a good save from Brian Godfrey, who saw the shot late, while Evans finished off a fine move with a powerful left foot drive that the keeper could only parry.

When Kettleborough began the second half by heading Evans's cross wide, it seemed Wanderers would struggle especially when Hitchin took the lead in the 54th minute. Peter Watson found Paul Giggie who was given far too much room by Bob Davies. He made the most of it by clipping over a near post

cross for Steve Baker to head neatly inside the post.

But Wanderers' reply was immediate. From the kick off Pearson sent a superb diagonal pass through the defence to Holifield who ran on and tucked the ball past Godfrey. Two minutes later, the Blues had taken the lead. Holifield's corner sailed to the far post where Pearson got a touch. Hitchin failed to clear and Alan Phillips gleefully hooked the ball home.

CONFIDENCE

Kettleborough could have sewed it up there and then with a header that was again wide from Holifield's cross but Wanderers were now playing with confidence. Stretching their game wide, Holifield and Evans were a constant menace on the left, giving right back Mick Grafton an unpleasant afternoon.

But Hitchin were far from finished. They, too, had their chances and Baker almost equalised when Mead's clearance struck a player and bounced right into the Hitchin forward's path, but he drove straight at Spittle. Martin saw a shot deflected just past the post by Birdseye while there was one almighty scramble inside the Blues' box before the ball was finally pumped clear.

Godfrey's long goalkicks often troubled Wycombe but their back four stuck to their task well and withstood all that Hitchin could muster in the closing stages.

It was Wycombe, in fact, who had the best chance to score with six minutes to go. Holifield burst through the home defence and took the ball round Godfrey. The angle for a shot was too acute, so he squared the ball back to Kettleborough who had time to steady himself but then lofted the ball high over the top. Perhaps 'Kets' didn't want to inflict too heavy a defeat on his old team-mates but chances like that must be accepted if the Blues are to take the championship.

HITCHIN: B. Godfrey; M. Grafton, H. Brimson, R. Brown, S. Gear, A. Martin, J. Whishaw, K. Hammond, S. Baker (sub H. Wilson 75 mins), P. Watson, P. Giggie.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, S. Mackenzie, J. Priestley, M. Holifield, I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough, D. Evans. Sub S. Hill (not used).

REFEREE: J. Baker (Doddington).
HALF-TIME: 0-0. Goalscorers, Hitchin — Baker (54), Wycombe — Holifield (54), Phillips (56).

Attendance: 783.

Latest table

ROTHMANS ISTHMIAN LEAGUE DIVISION ONE (Up to and inc 11/4/77)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts	Pen Pts
	C	D						
Enfield	38	21	11	6	57	33	74	5 4
Wycombe Wanderers	36	20	8	8	58	28	68	1 0
Dagenham	35	19	8	8	57	32	65	3 0
Tilbury	37	17	11	9	53	42	62	5 4
Leatherhead	37	18	7	12	60	38	61	3 0
Hendon	36	17	8	11	53	41	59	5 0
Tooting and Mitcham	34	15	8	11	68	57	53	8 0
Hitchin Town	32	16	5	11	45	44	53	3 0
Barking	37	15	7	15	57	53	52	3 0
Walthamstow Avenue	34	15	5	14	50	47	50	8 0
Leytonstone	37	13	11	13	52	51	50	7 8
Slough Town	30	14	6	10	40	35	48	1 0
Staines Town	30	13	8	9	36	26	47	2 0
Sutton United	38	13	7	18	37	50	46	2 0
Southall	38	13	6	19	48	62	45	9 4
Croydon	35	12	6	17	31	38	43	3 0
Bishop's Stortford	36	11	9	16	46	53	42	1 4
Kingstonian	39	12	5	22	41	58	41	8 0
Woking	37	9	10	18	42	58	37	8 4
Hayes	35	9	7	19	41	64	34	1 4
Ilford	37	9	7	21	27	66	34	12 0
Dulwich Hamlet	34	6	7	21	35	57	25	1 4